

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FEDERAL OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT TO HONOR CHIEF JUSTICE MAURA D. CORRIGAN

LANSING, MI, September 23, 2002 – Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan will be one of two recipients of a national award for improvements to child support in Michigan, the Michigan Supreme Court announced today.

The Department of Health and Human Services recently notified Corrigan that she, along with Family Independence Agency Director Doug Howard, had been chosen to receive the Judicial and Executive State Partnership Award. The award, which is given by the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), will be presented to Corrigan and Howard at the OCSE's annual training conference tomorrow in Arlington, Virginia.

In a letter to Corrigan, OCSE Commissioner Sherri Z. Heller said, "Your commitment and leadership in working with Doug to implement a statewide automated system and other initiatives resulted in significant improvements within the State of Michigan's Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program."

Heller noted that, following the state's conversion to the CSE program, "Michigan reported an increase in collections in the first six months of Fiscal Year 2002 that exceeded the increase of collections in the preceding two years."

The Child Support Enforcement System (CSES) is a statewide computer system required by federal law, making it possible for prosecutors and Friends of the Court across the country to track down parents who fail to pay child support. As of January 1, 2001, when Corrigan became Chief Justice, ten Michigan counties' Friend of the Court offices had not converted to CSES, and the state faced millions of dollars in federal penalties. All ten counties, including Wayne County, converted to CSES by the October 1, 2001 deadline. Michigan now awaits federal certification of CSES. If certified, Michigan could recoup millions of dollars in federal sanctions that the state has already paid, in addition to avoiding future penalties. While CSES is managed by the Michigan Family Independence Agency, Corrigan has said that the system's success "is a top priority of this Court."

Corrigan said she was “thrilled and deeply honored” by the OCSE award. She praised Howard for his efforts to implement the CSE program, adding that “the judicial branch will continue to be partners with FIA in our joint mission: to protect and support Michigan’s children.”

But Corrigan cautioned that improvements to the state’s child support enforcement system are only among “the first of many steps we must take for Michigan’s children.”

“We are making progress, but our job does not end with implementing the CSE system, nor does our obligation to Michigan’s children conclude with improved delivery of child support,” she said.

In 2001, 70 percent of circuit court filings were family law cases, representing over 262,000 new cases that year, Corrigan noted. “If we have one mother, one father, and one child per case, that’s nearly 800,000 people,” she said. “And that’s in addition to the cases already in the court system.”

Recent statistics indicate that “in Michigan, about one of every three people is involved in the Friend of the Court system, as a child support payer or as a recipient,” Corrigan continued. “And of cases before the Friend of the Court, about 46 percent are also paternity cases. These are staggering numbers. As a society, we have to look behind these numbers and find out what the causes are. We certainly know what the effects are, child poverty being one of them. That’s why our task does not end with improving child support.”

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“The judicial power of the state is vested exclusively in one court of justice . . .”

— *Michigan Constitution, Article VI, Section I*